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# Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

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P R E L U D E.Through Washington to Jerusalem.

No name better illustrates the historical Jesus than that of Abraham Lincoln; reasonably near to our time, with documents numerous and lengthy, here was a man of men immersed in the social struggle of his time: a great man. Yet a man of mystical force, one who believed that the ways of God are mysterious and profound beyond all comprehension: and a man who could set within English speech three speeches that are surpassed only by The Bible and Shakespeare.

If we cannot be sure of meeting Jesus as he walked through Galilee, died upon Calvary, it is strangely true we are not quite sure of all the facts of even The President. Were any of his cabinet involved in the assassination? Did the impressive brilliance of Donati's comet in 1858 strangely influence the mind of the public, make them more ready to hear, to listen to this prophet from the far places of their land?

Did astronomers find revision of the orbit of this comet possible it would indeed be odd if it could be the Star of Bethlehem.

If nothing was to be expected from Nazareth, yet one of startling ability moved through that history with meteoric impressiveness, it is to be noted that there was in the unknown figure from the backwoods a something that enforced respect. If never man spoke like Jesus how strange that the gaunt tall dark rugged man of sad serenity spoke as rarely politician or statesman ever speaks.

When Lincoln was but twenty three, struggling to live, he went with some others to hear a Dr. Peter Akers: a three hour sermon is an event; and has time to develop a great theme: 'American slavery will come to an end in some near decade, I think in the sixties.' Then the preacher cried out: 'Who can tell but that the man who shall lead us through this strife may be standing in this presence.' And a hush fell. Back home Lincoln said 'when the preacher was describing the civil war I distinctly saw myself, as in second sight, bearing an important part in that strife.'

Asked the next day why so haggard, what's the matter, Lincoln said: 'I am utterly unable to shake myself free from the conviction that I shall be involved in that terrible war.' Is there a parallel to the baptism of Jesus in this episode? Even were both myth they would both be equally significant. But as the American story is true it helps confirm the gospel that a young man saw the Holy Spirit, as a dove, descend: giving celestial accolade to The Knights of God: how poor all other titles are against the radiant shining titles given to Jesus by the evangelists. Truly of Jesus of Nazareth the gospels created Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, The Christ, The Saviour of the World.

And the Admiration, the Devotion men gave to the historical Jesus as the titles widened, deepened, elevated, this became its own best evidence that the Holy Spirit promised to follow Calvary did indeed enter history.

'Never man spake like this man' is finely illustrated in the Great Debate when Judge Douglas met Lincoln at Alton. The deep set eyes, the prominent jaw, the brawny hand - yet above all the words, The Word, this triumphed over all hearers. Was something near to this the secret of far Galilee when One came from sunlit Galilee to Jerusalem to tell his glad tidings of Redemption; social and personal. But Jesus found Calvary, while the lesser, great against all others, found assassination.

Before an almost incredible rise to eminence from nothingness no one appears to have spotted Lincoln: did any, other than The Virgin Mother, in the secrecy of love for her first born, did any other see in the precocious boy seated amongst the doctors, The One.

Lincoln's strange solitariness, even in his times in court, certainly in his cabinet time, this is very near to The Temptation in the Wilderness, the Gethsemane loneliness. But this parallel adds little to our deep love of Jesus: though it does make his humanity more human. We see him as he was: Admiration supplements Incarnation as a mortal word to speak of the divine.



Sit in loneliness with the impressive monument to Lincoln, in London if you are not privileged to visit America, and almost the figure comes down to share with you your early manhood; looking at you with mystical awe. The Universe in a statue that walks. And countless millions have thus seen Jesus of Nazareth, The Lord Jesus Christ, The Saviour of the World, as given in the lightning flashes of divine history told by Mark: as recorded by the god-filled typist who recorded the words of immortal beauty we name Matthew: as whispered to a dying world by the tender stethoscope that asked all men to say Ah! a gracious story all homes name Luke: and then, then, the bridge of stars whereon men walk from unrest to peace as John, an old old man repeats the words of eternal life.

'If ever I get a chance to hit this thing I'll hit it hard.' What strange arrogance, or sureness of calling, gave to the young man, garbed in poverty, what gave to him this prophetic awareness of high destiny? If only we could have a like glimpse into the youthful vision of Jesus: How deeply we long it could be given us. Or was his vision of an even higher elevation than that of Lincoln; did Jesus glimpse within the warped idiom of his time, that spiritual freedom was the one great virtue, valuable as political freedom would be, when miraculously granted by High Providence.

It is told there was something about Lincoln that enforced respect. A like quality must have been in Jesus. Lincoln, a bony wiry sad man floated into his legal practise unknown, no one to meet him: 'thirty years later the peculiar man left, as President of the United States, backed by friends, power, fame and all human force.' How came it that within but ten years Jesus left obscurity to take upon himself a national fame; his own preference in title Son of Man; but given others of even deeper meaning, until all culminated in the Johannine Jesus Christ, The Saviour of the World. With but a few years preparation, and an even shorter period of public service, Jesus broke all barriers in time and history; after few years, unending honour.

Lincoln's power over words, simple words, takes us by divine surprise: we read several times each time we read yet never tire. The interval twixt the reading allows deep impression to meditate. Whatever else is true of Jesus assuredly his power over simple words is final. The parables are so final in their simplicity. The Beatitudes are final in divine brevity: never did simple words, so briefly set, tell so much.

Though all four writers give tribute to Jesus, though each evangelist may have changed or fashioned, even John gives to Jesus sentences of ordinary words telling extraordinary good news. I am the Good Shepherd, The True Vine and The Comforter passages, all these are told in sentences of such easy homely words they could be Mother talking bed-wise to restless children. Yet they are more than this. There is a hidden power.

'The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature....' 'But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate - we cannot consecrate - we cannot hallow - this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or to detract...' 'Fondly do we hope - fervently do we pray - that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away.'

If these words are in our hearts and minds, how greatly the words of Jesus are in our breathing. No long complex words in either. And western culture will renew its moral strength through Bible words, Bible stories. School leavers we find do enjoy being asked to give and explain their favourite sentence from Jesus. It only is right that at the close teacher tell his, briefly telling why.

'And Jesus said to his disciples, it is inevitable that offences will happen in history: but woe betide that man who brings them about.' That words, irresistible in their force, simple as a glass of water, powerful as Niagara Falls: quoted by Lincoln in his Second Inaugural. ~~Greater Lincoln quoted this in his Second Inaugural.~~ Greater than historian or philosopher Lincoln made history: and what Lincoln realised in greatness Jesus vastly achieved, becoming The Pattern of our Personal and Social Redemption.

For the one person who could describe the Battle of Gettysburg, even in America, one million know a great deal about the words of ~~Lincoln~~ <sup>Jesus</sup>. In the beginning was the word: and at the end, is The Word.



For the one thousand who could tell The Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius, Emperor of the Romans, there are ten million who can nearly recite The Beatitudes. He that has eyes to read let him read again; observing the childlike simplicity; yet every sentence, patterned on The Book of Proverbs, holds within its simplicity the later thought of many mighty and influential books on religion and philosophy. However did St. John dare to write: 'if all were written down concerning Jesus the world itself would not hold all the books.'

As Homer well knew, as every peasant knows and every motorist knows, Time Fate and Death are The Lords of the Universe, sombre and dark behind all other gods; whether on the Island of Bali, whether in Moscow, Peking, Washington, London, East or West Berlin, all gods are human imaginings, set upon the dark back drop that Homer named. Sing a song of dollars or man the anti aircraft, let gaiety or sadness be the mood of the hour, gentle and soothing Death will take man, beast or apple tree to oblivion.

Time gives to Death a job of work taking care of all who are tired of living. But sometimes the Big Junk Man comes earlier than need be to take Abraham Lincoln as Calvary took Jesus earlier than normal. But The Cross was a desperate shame: cruelty, mockery, agony, then the long long restful peace, the peace that comes to all grandparents. Beautifully so what seemed an infinite shame was changed by human love, divine insight into an eternity of honour.

#### Spirit over History.

Ann was as average a lovely baby as any mother could desire: neither hospital nor surgeon boded any ill. All the nurses in maternity smiled as mother and baby went home.

Laughing dancing sprite of mischief, wheedling father, teasing mother, Ann's childhood knew that life was joyful. Eyes aquiver, sprite of dolphins, naval service thrilled her ardour when war called her courage; armistice celebrations added joy to hope: her bridegroom came.

Through marriage hymn in radiant beauty, of quiet voice, in dress discreet, vows exchanged, in due time came two sons, and one dog. So the little English home was completed; mortgage not yet paid up.

Then, then, awesome, silent, little warning, pain darkened her daylight, pain blacked her night. Deep, deep, savage, short stabs: then, then, muscled movement all gone, she knew in her waking agony that polio knows no compassion.

Yes, the Sister of Mercy was there with words, with a skilled touch to prevent Ann drowning in her own saliva; but Ann could then accept the immemorial words of church comfort and wondered if being saved from death was worth the ungraphed stabs of pain. And in the far recesses of the alert mind Satan mocked; 'Chance is Lord, curse God and die.'

Resurrection, sprite of mischief, Ann the Wren gave God smart salute; spirit triumphed over sickness. No; not even The Lord Jesus has been known as yet to heal Polio or Spinal Bifida. Ann's body lay immobilised; movement scarce ten per cent of her one time athletic frame.

Yet, her spirit triumphed. Though life depended now on iron lung, she would never leave it, to eke out family budget she learned to typewrite - with her eyes: and became a sprite of Fleet Street. In that street of blazing inkwells no one had ever conquered such disability nor surfaced again after near drowning in such strange ocean.

Through all trial her husband was love and patience; in servitude to a council job, in service to a love and a wife that fashioned one ordinary English home. The ordinary can be extraordinary. Could TV ensilver this courage, never a gunshot, never a slanted joke, never text from The Bible, why, The Everlasting Mercy would move through every home in our English speaking world. The Home is the granite rock upon which parliament is builded.

When a visitor called he saw deep in her X-ray eyes that the Schweitzer glance lay buried. In her The Eternal Feminine touched by Compassion that comes, ever comes from before Kwan Yin, the glance was there. Through The Virgin Mother, as created by Luke, age old, yet modern as an undergraduate, this was in the journalist eyes that lived with death, yet looked on life even joyously.

Certainly, a thousand thousand stories of Courage can be told. This is but one illustration. Death must take its tribute: but, pain is a more terrible lord of mankind than death; yet even this, even pain and fear can be met with Courage. Ann is but one symbol: others are in every hospital, every street.

1850



